



# CITY OF HOUSTON

**Sylvester Turner**

Mayor

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February 18, 2019

The Honorable Senfronia Thompson  
Chairman, House Public Health Committee  
Austin, Texas 78701

Dear Chairman Thompson,

Behavioral health has been underfunded, not only in Texas, but throughout the United States. Working alongside you, and many others, I am proud that Texas has turned its focus toward investing in mental health and substance use disorder.

We know that half of all mental health disorders show signs and symptoms before the age of 14. Texas has made investments in programs such as Mental Health First Aid to provide teachers a basic understanding of how to respond to a mental health crisis. However, shootings at local schools and an increase in adolescent suicide have made it distinctly apparent that Texas needs to do a much better job addressing the mental health care of our children. Because of our shared passion for students and their success, I enthusiastically support House Bill 10 to address these pressing issues.

HB 10 confronts our mental health care crisis by tackling the issue at its core; the workforce. There are simply not enough mental health care professionals to address the current, and growing need. In fact, over 200 Texas counties don't have a *single* child or adolescent psychiatrist.

With Texas facing a severe shortage of mental health professionals, HB 10 would help address gaps in the system by providing supplemental grants for child and psychiatric residencies and fellowships. It would also provide new grants to institutions with nursing programs to increase the number of Advance Practice Registered Nurses (APRNs) who specialize in child and adolescent psychiatric nursing.

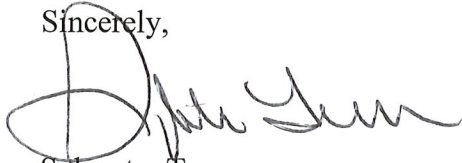
Further, HB 10 creates the Texas Behavioral Health Research Institute (TBHRI). The institute is made up of the chairs of our health-related institutions' departments of psychiatry, three gubernatorial appointees and a group of pediatricians. The TBHRI would:

- Provide grants to medical schools and community mental health providers for mental health services and treatment.
- Establish a network of regional hubs designed to enhance consultation and referral.
- Promote the use of telepsychiatry to increase access to mental health professionals and assist school personnel.
- Develop behavioral health services for high-risk populations.

- Develop a behavioral health research program for medical schools to provide research grants.
- Create an addiction crisis grant program focused on research and education related to opioids.

Texas created the groundbreaking CPRIT program to address cancer. We should treat mental illness like we do cancer – with early intervention. It's time we did more to address the mental health of our children.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sylvester Turner". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "S" and a long, sweeping underline.

Sylvester Turner  
Mayor